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FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5669  
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

S E C R E T BAGHDAD 000395

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/05/2018

TAGS: PGOV PINR PINS PTER IZ

SUBJECT: AQI USES WOMAN WITH DOWN'S SYNDROME TO ATTACK  
MARKET

Classified By: Deputy Political Counselor Greg D'Elia for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: District Council chairmen in Baghdad told poloff February 2 that Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) detonated bombs in two popular markets on February 1 as part of a desperate bid for attention on the one year anniversary of the launch of the Baghdad Security Plan and the second anniversary of the bombing of the Samara Mosque. These market bombings, which resulted in at least 29 deaths (including the two assailants), represent the most devastating mass casualty attacks in Baghdad since August 1, 2007, when three car bombs killed 80 people. Coalition intelligence analysts and the Brigade (4/10 MTN) covering the districts where the attacks took place have revealed that both women bombers were patients in area mental hospitals. One of the women almost certainly had Down's Syndrome and the other reportedly suffered from schizophrenia. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Former Rusafa District Council Chairman Jamal H. Khalaf told poloff February 2 that he believes Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) detonated bombs February 1 in two Baghdad markets out of desperation. Shortly after the bombing, Khalaf said, he rushed to the scene in the Shorja pet market of the Rusafa district, where he saw a devastating spectacle of carnage. AQI is weaker now, he argued, and desperately needs attention. (NOTE: Desperate or not, MNF-I STRATEFF notes, AQI continues to carry out mass attacks and targeted assassinations. END NOTE.) Karada District Council Chairman Mohammed Al Rubeiy argued February 2 that AQI conducted the attacks to mark the one year anniversary of the Baghdad Security Plan, and to commemorate the bombing of the Samara Mosque )- these two events, he noted, have anniversaries in early February. While both district council members remained uncertain as to whether the suicide bombers had Down's Syndrome )- as local and international media have widely reported )- they agreed that the bombings have increased public contempt for AQI.

¶3. (C) The Brigade (4/10 MTN) covering the Rusafa and 9 Nissan districts, where the attacks took place, took photographs of the female attackers which indicate that at least one had Down's Syndrome, and that she did not likely detonate the bomb located in her backpack. (NOTE: MNC-I does not have evidence for the latter claim, and the Brigade was unable to conduct a DNA test to verify the former claim. END NOTE.) Officers in 4/10 note that the explosives in her backpack, which also contained ball bearings, detonated in the Souk Al Ghazil pet market in 9 Nissan district, killing 21 and wounding 30. The second bombing, which took place 10 minutes later in the Shorja pet market, involved a suicide vest containing ball bearings of similar make to the ball bearings in the earlier explosion, and resulted in the death of 8 and the wounding of 23.

¶4. (C) Media accounts appear to over-estimate the total number of casualties, with AP reporting that 99 were killed and AFP reporting 98 killed. (NOTE: MNF-I bases its casualty

estimates on the dead bodies that soldiers count at the scene of the bombing; their estimate does not include victims who later die of their injuries. Khalaf told poloff that he has learned, in the aftermath of past mass casualty attacks in Baghdad's central urban areas, that more than 50 percent of Iraqis wounded during the bombing later die of their injuries. END NOTE.)

¶5. (S) Coalition intelligence sources have revealed that both women bombers were patients in area mental hospitals. The woman who did not appear to have Down's Syndrome reportedly suffered from schizophrenia, and local sources claim that AQI operatives convinced her that they would provide her with medication if she carried out their wishes.

¶6. (U) COMMENT: In determining how to refer to the woman with Down's Syndrome who unwittingly carried out the attack on the market -- wearing a backpack that was remotely detonated by the true perpetrator and not knowing that death would be her lot -- post perceives a deficit in the vocabulary required to describe the moral abomination of this act. Describing her as an "assailant" or "attacker" fails to capture her true role as the involuntary agent of terrorists who used her life to take the lives of other innocent civilians. END COMMENT.

CROCKER